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ABSTRACT

The curriculum content of elementary and secondary school social studies is discussed as it relates to the assessment of social studies learning. In addition, recommendations are made for future efforts in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The social studies curriculum involves both factual learning and concept learning. Topics in grades K-5 generally focus on the: child, family, and school; neighborhood; local community; state and region; and nation. Grades 6-8 usually emphasize world cultures, while high school courses are dominated by history and government. Although the learning of facts is important in social studies, assessment should also indicate whether or not students can use the collection of facts in a meaningful way. Concept learning allows students to organize and relate information, and it facilitates understanding. Concepts vary in their degrees of complexity, abstraction, and differentiation. Concepts may be learned through an informal curriculum or serendipitously, since a great deal of social studies teaching concentrates on facts. Multiple choice tests are not useful in testing students' understanding of concepts. Instead, the pretesting and posttesting of concepts in which students are weak is suggested. NAEP items should ask students to explain, interpret, compare, express relationships, and draw conclusions. (GDC)

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The Assessment of Social Studies Knowledge

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August, 1986

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Paper prepared for the Social Studies Advisory Committee on National Assessment, U.S. Department of Education

THE ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES KNOWLEDGE

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The intent of this paper is to give a brief summary of the kinds of topics dealt with in social studies courses and programs in the United States, thereby giving the reader some idea of what is meant by the term "social studies" as it is taught in our elementary and secondary schools. A somewhat more detailed discussion of the difference between factual and conceptual learning then follows, along with a discussion of the implications of the difference between the two for assessment of social studies learnings. Recommendations for future national assessment efforts in the social studies are then suggested.

The Subject Matter of the Social Studies

The "social studies" is a rather unusual subject, both for the diversity of topics that are included in social studies programs around the country, and for the fact that there is very little agreement among social studies professionals* as to exactly what subject matter should be included in the social studies curriculum. The greatest concensus perhaps can be found in the view that the basic content of the social studies curriculum comes essentially from the disciplines of the social sciences and history. Although there is some disagreement about the nature of the social sciences as a whole,

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* that is, those individuals who view the major focus of their professional careers as the development of social studies curricula and theory, and/or the training of social studies teachers.

the disciplines most commonly identified by social studies educators are the following: anthropology (the study of culture -- the ways of life of human beings all over the globe); geography (the study of place -- how it affects and how it has been affected by human beings); political science (the study of power -- how it is obtained, used, and distributed, and the decisions human beings make in the process); economics (the study of choice -- the choices human beings make when faced with the allocation of limited material resources and their distribution in order to achieve certain ends of varying importance); sociology (the study of group life -- how human beings live in groups, why groups are formed, persist, and fall apart); psychology (the study of individuals -- how human beings act, think, and feel as individual persons, and why they do). Although other disciplines or areas of study (such as philosophy or law) are mentioned from time to time, it is pretty safe to state, I would venture, that the above six disciplines, plus history (the study of people and events over time -- what has happened in the past and why, to whom, and what has resulted from these happenings) constitute the primary data base of content for most social studies courses and/or programs.

The content that is taken from these disciplines is organized and presented in a great variety of courses and programs in the various grades from Kindergarten to the last year in high school (K-12). Both the range and the amount of courses and topics to be found within school districts throughout the nation is quite large. Some idea of the diversity of

topics, ideas, themes, etc. that are studied in some form or just another/in grades K-8, for example, can be obtained by perusing the following partial listing of what is to be found in various elementary social studies programs:

Kindergarten: Who Am I? Me; Home; Family; Family Helpers; Our School; Going to the Store; The Airport; Trucks; Getting to Know Myself; People and the Environment; Places Near and Far Away;

Grade One. People in Families; Living and Working in Our Community; Things We Do: Living With Others; Families Around the World; Food, Clothing, and Shelter; Family Helpers; Our Neighborhood; Children of Other Lands; Travel and Rest; Transportation and Communication; Helping at Home and at Play.

Grade Two. Our Community; Communities Around the World; Our Neighborhood; The World Around Us; City Communities around the World; People in Neighborhoods; World Cities; Working Together; The Supermarket; The Fire Department; Services in Our Community; Producing Goods and Services; Special Days and Customs: Our School.

Grade Three. Life in Cities; How Cities Grow; Ancient Athens; Problems of City Life; Cultures Around the World; How People Live in other Places; Being a Good Citizen; Cities Around the World; Native Americans; Living in Our Community; Urban Problems; Transportation; How People Communicate.

Grade Four. Planet Earth; Our State; Regions around the World; Greece and Rome; The Middle Ages; Life in Other Countries of the World; People in States; Great People in Our History; A Case Study of the Amish; The Pilgrims; How the United States Began; Great American Leaders; The Discovery and Exploration of America; The Establishment of the United States; How Regions Change.

Grade Five. The United States; Famous Persons in American History; The American Revolution; The Constitution of the United States; People in America; American Beginnings; The Civil War; Americans on the Move; The Mid-Atlantic States; Our World; How People of the United States and Canada Use Their Geography; How Latin Americans Use Technology; How the People of Asia Use Their Geography; Geography of the Western Hemisphere; Regions of the United States.

Grade Six. European Backgrounds; The Way People Live; The Eastern Hemisphere; World Geography; Canada; World Cultures; Early Civilizations; How Human Life Began; Western Civilization; Other Lands and Lives; Cultures Around

the World; Latin America; India; China; Asia; Africa; Life in Latin America; Our American Neighbors; The United Nations; Our Neighbor to the North; Living in Mexico; The Cultural Beginnings of theWestern World; Economic Problems Facing the World Today.

Grade Seven. World Cultures; A Study of the Western Hemisphere; A Study of the Eastern Hemisphere; Our State; Europe; Western Europe; Old World Backgrounds; Greece and Rome; The Middle Ages; The Renaissance and the Reformation; The Eastern World; Geography of the Western World; Africa; Japan; Southeast Asia; Why People Moved to the New World; How the Thirteen Colonies Became a New Nation; The Middle East; The Soviet Union.

Grade Eight. The Constitution of the United States; American Beginnings; Local Government; America's Past; Urban Problems; The American Revolution; The Westward Movement; The Civil War; New York and its Problems; The National Government; Federalism; The Growth of Industry; The Contributions of Minority Groups to American Life; Becoming a World Power; Communism; America as a World Power; America's Role in the Future.

As you can see, there is a considerable diversity of topics, questions, themes, etc. Nevertheless, there remains a rather high degree of concensus as to the central focus of instruction in grades 1-5. For the last twenty years, many, if not most, of the major (and minor) publishers of commercial elementary social studies textbooks have focused on the following topics as the central themes of textbooks published for the first five grades.

Grade	Topic
K-1	The child, the family, the school
2	The neighborhood
3	The local community
4	The state and the region
5	The nation

Thus, one of the most widely used and copied elementary

social studies programs of the 1970s had the following emphases for its' textbooks for grades 1-5:

Grade One. People in Families. A comparative study, in pictures, of life among eight different families -- in New York, Massachusetts, Minnesota, California, Kenya, France, Canada, and Mexico.

Grade Two. People in Neighborhoods. A comparative study of life in three different neighborhoods in Chicago, Illinois.

Grade Three. People in Communities. A comparative study of life among the Bedouin of the Negev, the Yoruba of Ife, the Thai of Bangkok, and the Norwegians of Hemnesberget.

Grade Four. People in States. A comparative study of life among the people of Mysore State in India, Osaka Prefecture in Japan, the Republic of Serbia in Yugoslavia, and the Province of Nova Scotia in Canada.

Grade Five. People in America. A comparative study of life among six families, of differing ethnic backgrounds in the United States today, followed by a chronological development dealing with "American Beginnings," "Americans in Revolt," "Americans Divided," and "Americans on the Move."[1]

A newer series, published just this year (1986), reflects the same emphases:

Grade K - America's Children

Grade 1 - America's Families

Grade 2 - America's Neighborhoods

Grade 3 - America's Communities

Grade 4 - America's Regions (and Regions of the World)

Grade 5 - America's History[2]

Although an occasional variation to this basic pattern can be found, most commercial publishers continue to follow it rather closely. Grades 6-8 are not as standardized, although it is not unusual to find some emphasis on studying world cultures or selected areas of the globe (e.g., "China," "The Western Hemisphere", etc.) in grade 7, and some aspect of United

States History [again!] in grade 8.

In grades 9-12, history and government dominate, although there is considerable variety as to what is taught when and where. The most commonly offered courses are some form of world history, some form of U.S. history, U.S. government, political/economic geography, community civics, and economics. According to the most recent data available,[3] 40 per cent or more of all the secondary schools in the nation offer courses in these subjects. Roughly one-third of all secondary schools offer courses in state history, sociology, and psychology, while about 20 per cent offer courses in basic American law and consumer economics. Other courses, such as anthropology, environmental studies, philosophy, etc., are offered by about 10 to 15 per cent of all secondary schools. World history is the course offered by the largest percentage of schools in the United States, with over 70 per cent of all secondary schools offering it.

The largest percentage of students enroll in some form of U.S. history, followed closely by enrollment in world history and U.S. government. Enrollment in courses in anthropology, sociology, and economics has been on the rise in recent years, while enrollment in courses in state history, community civics, and problems of democracy [the study of personal and societal problems] has been on the decline.

Although requirements and electives in social studies vary from state to state and from district to district within states [even sometimes within the same district],

it can be said that most districts in most states recommend that students take at least three years of social studies. In 1982, 65.4 per cent of all secondary students earned three or more credits in social studies, and 23.4 per cent earned four or more![4] Unfortunately, however, there is little agreement as to what particular titles (e.g., U.S. history; world backgrounds; etc.) mean so far as what the basic content that makes up the course includes. One can only say that all states offer a number of courses, but that these courses vary considerably in terms of what they focus on and what they include. By way of example, here is merely a partial listing of the various kinds of social studies courses that are offered in secondary schools throughout the nation:

> World Geography; Physical Geography; Cultural Geography; World Cultures; State and Local Government; Citizenship; Civics; World History; Ancient History; Asian History; African History; Modern Europe; British History; Greece and Rome: Twentieth-Century American History; Comparative Political Systems; Comparative Economic Systems; Women in American Life; Ethnic Studies; Anthropology; Psychology; Economics: Environmental Studies; American Government; Problems of American Democracy; Problems of Contemporary Life; Sociology; Eastern Civilizations; Western Civilizations; World Studies; Exploring the Past: Youth and theLaw; Urban Studies; Introduction to the Social Sciences; Social and Political History; Economic History; The American Political System; Social Psychology; Travel; Consumer Education: World War; Labor History; Black Studies; Power in American Life; Leaders and Leadership; Career Education; Minorities in

American Life; The American Indian; The Cold War; You and Your Rights; Reform and Protest in American History; African Culture; Revolutionary Movements; History of Canada; History of China; Man and Society; Mexico; Russian History; World Religions; Values and Ethics; War and Peace; Life and Leisure.

No district offers all of these courses, of course, and the length of the course (9-week, semester, year-long, etc.) and the grade level in which the course is offered vary considerably. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that any sort of carefully planned for and coordinated, systematic social studies program which covers the full K-12 range does not, to my knowledge, exist!

In sum, then, it can be said that there is a fair amount of concensus about what should be the focus of social studies instruction in grades K-5,(although it is difficult to find much in the way of social studies being actually taught in grades K-3, since most teachers concentrate on instruction in reading and mathematics in those grades); some concensus (but not much) in grades 6-8; and even less in grades 9-12.

I dwell on the above in some detail because I believe that the nature and amount of social studies content (the kinds of topics, themes, ideas, etc.) that is taught in social studies in our elementary and secondary schools must be considered before any sensible proposals and decisions about assessment can be made. Before I suggest a few possibilities in this regard, however, I want to discuss the kinds of subject matter that are (or might be) taught in social studies programs and/or courses, grade level notwithstanding.

Levels of Knowledge

Most, if not all, social studies professionals agree that the nature of social studies knowledge -- that is, the actual content to be learned, regardless of the kind of course within which it falls (i.e., regardless of whether it is historical content, or geographic content, or sociological content, etc.) -- can be viewed in at least two different ways. We can ask ourselves whether we want the emphasis of subject matter learning in the social studies to be on a factual or a conceptual level. The distinction is a crucial one, I think, for it can determine the usefulness -- i.e., the usability -- of much of the knowledge that students acquire in social studies courses. In order to illustrate why this is so, I need first to give some examples of what I mean by the terms "facts" and "concepts," and show how they differ.

Facts. Facts (e.g., "Henry Thoreau is the author of Walden;" "the United Nations was formed in 1945;" "John F. Kennedy was elected to the Presidency of the United States in 1960;" "Sacramento is the capitol of California;" etc.) are specific knowledge claims about the world in which we live. The activities of people, the dates on which events occurred, the location of places, the size of objects -- all are facts. Facts are statements about the world which we take to be true. Their "truth" depends on the presence or absence of empirical evidence to support their existence.

Teachers often insist that students learn a lot of facts in social studies courses, spending a lot of time in the early (and often the later) grades getting students to memorize the names of the Presidents, or the location of various natural resources around the globe, or the dates on which certain events occurred, or the steps a bill must go through to become a law, etc. An emphasis upon the learning of factual information *per se*, however, is a rather fruitless enterprise, since such information learned in isolation -- that is, not connected to other data -- is rarely remembered for very long, and almost impossible to *use* in any sort of meaningful way.

This is not to say that factual knowledge is not important. It is, of course, but such knowledge to be of any worth must be placed in a context of some sort. The context within which facts are used usually, if not always, determines *which* facts are important to learn. Learning the foods which Micronesians eat, for example, and the activities they consider important might have considerable import to a Foreign Service Officer or Peace Corps volunteer who will soon be living and working on the island of Truk. There also seems to be little doubt that some facts are more important that other facts, once we think about the situations or settings in which most Americans operate. For example, it is probably more important to know the basic rights one is guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution than to be able to name the dates on which each amendment to the Constitution was passed; probably more im-

portant to know the reasons which led to our participation in the war in Vietnam that the names of the battles or the generals who fought in the war.

Students need to acquire as much factual knowledge as their individual capabilities permit, since there is no question (I would argue) that facts are the building blocks of knowledge. One cannot become educated without acquiring a goodly number of facts. Students cannot make sense of the world without facts, since they tell us something about occurrences, events, and individuals.

The problem is that if facts are all that a student learns, he or she acquires nothing more than a grab-bag of disconnected information. Students also need be be able to tie together the facts they learn into meaningful relationships of various sorts so as to be able to more fully understand why events occur, places are located where they are, incidents occur, and individuals and nations act the way they do.

It is in this regard that merely assessing the extent of students' factual knowledge -- how many facts they know -- is not enough for it doesn't give us any idea if students are able to use the facts they possess in any meaningful way. When it comes to social studies learnings, any assessment of the content learned in social studies courses must go beyond merely determining if students know certain dates, names, locations, rules, or other facts, for this only gives us an idea of the amount of information they possess, not if they can apply such information, or tie it together in some way,

or explain its significance, etc. It is very important for any type of national assessment effort to gain some impression of this latter type of learning -- can students relate, or order, or structure in someway(s) the factual knowledge they have learned in their social studies courses?

It can be argued, therefore, that we need to both teach -- and test -- for more enduring forms of knowledge. Students need to be helped to acquire knowledge that is more widely applicable to other people, other times, and other places. We need, in other words, to think about teaching -- and assessing -- the conceptual knowledge which students are acquiring.

Concepts. Concepts [e.g., "law;" "dictatorship;" "dignity;" etc.] are generalized ideas of a class of objects. Whereas facts refer to a singular event, object, or individual, concepts represent the characteristics that are common to several events, objects, or individuals. Concepts represent our attempts to give order to factual information, to make sense out of the recurrent experiences we have and to organize the data we receive through our senses. When a particular experience occurs frequently enough that it causes us to sit up and take notice, for example, we usually invent a word to describe the experience. We notice that stoplights, plants, and emeralds are similar in a certain way, and we use the word "green" to talk about this similarity. We see that certain people are similar in several respects, say they all bit their fingernails continually, perspire a lot when asked to perform an unfamiliar task before others, and express verbally their uneasiness about the outcome of some-

thing, and we invent the word "anxious" when we wish to describe such people. We observe these people talking in a particular way, which we call "hurridly," and so on.

Concepts are extremely useful tools for students (or anyone) to acquire. They enable us to relate information -- to organize vast amounts of data by subsuming many specific facts under a more inclusive, general label. Concepts facilitate understanding because they enable us to see how these independent bits and pieces of information tie together. That George Washington was our nation's first elected President may be an interesting fact to some people. That the current President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, was once elected Governor of California may also be interesting to some. But there have been thousands of elections in many nations over the years. For a student to become an educated person must he or she learn the names, or the dates, or the details of the campaigns in all (or some, or even any) of these elections? An alternative might be instead to focus on the concept of "election," and to help students to recognize that this concept can be utilized to tie together a number of separate, discrete details. Thus, understanding the concept of "election" can help them understand that certain events which take place in the United States (or elsewhere) every so many years all possess certain characteristics in common. They learn that there will be candidates,

campaigns, platforms, issues, and offices at stake, and hence do not need to learn anew the specifics of each particular election to understand what is going on.

The learning of a large quantity of facts in and of themselves does not help students to tie those facts together in meaningful ways. The learning of concepts, on the other hand, provides meaning for facts and offers insights into a variety of specific situations. Is is one thing to learn about the countries of the world, who their leaders are, and important events in their history. But when students learn to ask how the actions of these leaders are related to the actions of other leaders in other countries, they begin to gain some insight into the workings of the world. By learning about the concept of "values", for example, students can begin to perceive that the actions of a country are influenced by the values of the country's leaders, and that examples to illustrate this are evident in ancient Athens, medieval France, pre-World War II Japan, or present-day Nicaragua.

Concepts also enable students to put information they acquire into some sort of <u>order</u>. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated the series of legislative acts in the 1930s that became the New Deal, there were consequences which followed and which are still felt in many ways today. There also were a number of events which led up to the passage of the New Deal. Students probably cannot remember each of these events, or even any of the New Deal legislation itself, but

they can perceive that events do occur in some order and that they often have consequences of one sort or another. Life itself is a sequences, steps, cycles, motions, causes, effects, and changes. By learning such concepts, students learn how information can be ordered -- that certain events occur because of, or result from, other events; that some activities (although not in exact, identical ways) have occurred before; that history has something to teach us after all.

Concepts are of many types. Some, for example, merely describe the commonalities which otherwise quite different things possess (e.g., the concepts of "chair," group," "topography," etc.); others are evaluative -- that is, they convey an impression of approval or disapproval (e.g., "good," "wrong," "beaufiful," etc.); and others represent a relationship of sorts (e.g., "population density," "speed," "income tax bracket," etc.)

Concepts also differ in terms of how abstract, complex, or differentiated they are. With regard to abstractness, concepts differ in the degree to which their attributes can be pointed to or experienced directly -- compare the concept of "factory," for example, with the concept of "honor." With regard to complexity, they differ in the number of attributes needed to define them -- compare the concept of "cat," for example, with the concept of "culture." With regard to differentiation, concepts differ in the number of forms the basic set of attributes can take to express somewhat different versions of the idea the concept represents -- compare the concept of "screwdriver," for example, which essentially takes only one form, with the concept of "fruit" which takes

many forms. The fact that concepts differ is important for teachers and evaluators to realize since the more abstract, complex, and differentiated a concept is, the more useful it is likely to be in helping students relate and order information, and thus, in turn, make more sense out of their experiences. An important goal of any national assessment effort in social studies should be to gain some idea of what concepts students have of themselves, other people, and the world in which they live.

The social science disciplines suggest to us many concepts that rank pretty high in terms of their complexity, abstraction, and differentiation. Scholars in these disciplines often use these concepts as organizing tools. In fact, there are many concepts which appear to be used by professionals from different disciplines that are the same. During the 1970s, many concepts were identified which different scholars from two or more disciplines used in their investigations -- i.e., they did indeed use the same concept in writing about some aspect of their findings and/or queries about the world.[5] Table 1 below shows several of these concepts, all of which were used by scholars from at least four different disciplines.[6]

Table 1
Frequently Used Social Science Concepts

attitudes	change	social structure	government
behavior	system	trade	group
institution	culture	democracy	motivation
norm	interaction	environment	resources
role	personality	mobility	socialization
society	power	values	

Concepts like these can be used by teachers as organizers for planning their courses as well. Table 2 which follows, for example, shows how the concept of "change" might be used as an organizing focus throughout a hypothetical set of courses in grades 7-12.

Table 2
Using the conept of "Change" as an organizing thread in Secondary Social Studies

Grade level	Courses in which the concept is to be developed	The concept of "change"
12	A comparative study of selected social problems in the United States.	alienation, crime, dissent, poverty, prejudice, pollution, urban decay, drugs, propeganda as causes effects of changes in American life-style.
11	A comparative study of selected periods in U.S. history.	Changes brought about immigration, wars, Presidential decisions, Congressional acts, political parties, expansion, inventions, international involvement, etc.
10	A comparative study of selected non-western cultures.	Similar to Grade 7
9	A comparative study of selected geographic areas throughout the world	How man both changes and is changed by interacting with his environment
8	A comparative study of selected areas of the United States	Changing life-styles in different parts of the U.S.
7	A comparative study of selected western cultures	Changes in human traditions, customs, occupations, products, means of entertainment, family patterns, political systems, beliefs, values, etc.

Implications for Evaluation

I have spent some time on the distinction between factual and conceptual learning because I believe that any national assessment of social studies learnings needs to take both into account. We need to have some idea, I would think, as to what the students in our schools are learning with regard to both. When we assess their factual learning, we gain some idea of what they know. In order to gain some idea of how well they can use what they know, however, we also have to assess their conceptual knowledge -- their ability to relate, order, and structure the facts which they possess. As I have argued, however, the emphasis should be on assessing students conceptual knowledge.

It appears to be a fact that the sort of knowledge students will be asked to learn in most social studies courses will be factual, not conceptual. A frequently repeated observation is that most social studies teachers concentrate on the teaching of facts, not concepts. As a result, therefore, much of the conceptual learning which students acquire is either serendipitous, or occurs as a result of the "informal curriculum," -- the daily activities that occur inside and around the school, but outside of the classroom. The activities and ideas (however obtained) of their friends and parents, the policy of the school administration, the statements of teachers, the ambience of the school, the extracurricular activities and the emphasis placed upon them, etc., all do contribute to student conceptual learning, although often not in ways that teachers and other educational figures intend.

Paradoxically, this seems to be even further justification for assessing conceptual learning, because if we only assess the extent of student factual knowledge, we gain only a very limited view of the amount of their social learning. We need to find out what ideas students have -- what concepts they are acquiring. What do they know and think about -- what concepts do they have of -- values, authority, justice, dignity, interdependence, cooperation, beauty, the cause(s) of events, power, how to make their way in the world, relationships, consequences, anger, patience, virtue, etc.

The above suggests a number of questions for anyone concerned with a national assessment of social studies learning, therefore, to consider:

. What do students know about:

- our history?
- our political, social, and economic institutions?
- our laws (and our rights under the law)?
- our geography?
- our society and its customs?
- our values?

The above questions, of course, get at the extent of students'

factual knowledge. But there are some additional questions which evaluators might consider in order to gain some idea of the extent of students' conceptual knowledge, to wit:

. What concepts do students possess?

. To what extent can students use the facts and concepts which they possess to express relationships, order data, suggest consequences, offer explanations, identify causes and effects, etc.

A concern for the assessment of conceptual knowledge forces me to ask whether the traditional form of assessment that has been performed in past national assessment efforts -- the use, in the main, of multiple-choice items -- is going to provide us with an adequate picture of the social learning and development of the young people in our nation's schools. I do not think that it can, for several reasons.

First, it has been argued that multiple-choice items tap only factual information.[8] It is very difficult to prepare multiple-choice items that will assess the degree to which students understand concepts.

Second, it is difficult to design multiple-choice items to give us some idea of the extent to which students can connect or order or structure facts into relationships -- in short, to give us some idea of the extent to which students can use the facts they possess in meaningful ways.

Third, using pencil-and-paper tests composed primarily of multiple-choice items actually obscures -- and can even mislead us concerning -- what we want to assess. Suppose that a particular sixth grader somewhere has, when school begins,

in a given year, no conception of the concept of "interdependence." Suppose this student is fortunate enough to have a teacher who, by way of multiple examples and discussions, helps him or her to grasp the concept, and to use it in his or her reading and talking about and trying to understand what goes on concerning the activities of different nations throughout the world. It is quite possible -- indeed very likely, I think -- that this student's understanding of and ability to use the concept may well not even be perceived by being assessed by only a few multiple-choice items which have been designed to measure (a) facts (primarily); and (b) a variety of objectives.

Suppose, now, that we pursue an alternative approach. Rather than giving selected samples of students a test consisting of, in the main, multiple-choice items during a single class period (the present NAEP procedure), suppose we were to spend more time pre-testing at the beginning of the school year finding out what concepts students are weak in, and then re-assessing them later on, or at the end of the year. We might find out that different students have actually learned a lot with regard to different concepts, although not necessarily (or even probably) with regard to all of them. This would require, given the current state of funding of NAEP efforts, a smaller sample, I suppose, with perhaps students in not all states in (but certainly all regions of) the country being assessed.

What I'm suggesting is that NAEP consider the possibility of asking teachers to monitor continually student progress in grasping and being able to use concepts to express their ideas about people, about the causes of events, about consequences, about their perceptions of the world and the things which happen in it. This could be done through the use of anecdotal records, analysis of student writings (see Newmann's paper in this regard), roleplaying, and interviewing. This might call for greater involvement by teachers in the assessment process, to be sure, but it would be more than offset by the fact that they are sure to feel (I'm willing to bet) a greater responsibility for, and involvement in, the learning and growth of their students, and more likely to be concerned about developing their conceptual power. It would also give us a better idea of the depth and power of our students' social learnings. I think it would be worth the time and effort involved by all concerned.

It might be argued that the most recent NAEP exercises do attempt to assess student ability to use information, but as I think Carlson's paper makes clear, the questions too often call for single "right" answers (e.g., "What is the best way to pursue the decision-making process?") when in reality several responses seem equally possible and defensible. What I am urging here is that we try to gain some idea of the extent to which students grasp important concepts, and are able to use them to relate, order, and structure information in a <u>variety</u> of ways, not to see if they merely can <u>identify</u> what NAEP exercise writers view to be the correct conclusion to be

drawn about information (e.g., in a graph or table) which they present to students.

Many of the questions in the most recent NAEP exercises do attempt to tap important ideas (e.g., "What factors would probably affect the living things in a river?"), but most of them simply test for factual knowledge (e.g., "What can happen to a law passed by Congress?", "What government officials are elected vs. appointed?"). Once again, extensive reliance on the multiple-choice format relegates NAEP efforts primarily to the assessment of student awareness of facts rather than more deeper forms of knowing and understanding. This can only be shown when students are asked to explain, to interpret, to make comparisons, to express relationships, to draw warranted conclusions from data, and the like.

Notes

1. The Taba Program in Social Science (Menlo Park, Calif.: Addison-Wesley, 1972-73.

2. The Ginn Social Studies Program (Lexington, Mass.: Ginn, 1986).

3. Center for Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvment, Fall, 1982. See also Irving Morrissent, "Status of Social Studies: The Mid-1980s, SOCIAL EDUCATION, April-May, 1986, 303-310.

4. See Morrisset, op. cit.; also Figurel. Percent of 1982 high school graduates earning varying numbers of credits for English, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, and computer science, in "More coursework in the new basics is needed to meet standards of National Commission on excellence," Bulletin, February, 1984.

5. Taken from a research report by Robert Ratcliffe, cited in New Approaches to and Materials for a Sequential Curriculum of American Society for Grades Five to Twelve; Vol. I, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Research, July, 1970, 131-35.

6. Ibid.

7. See James P. Shaver, O.L. Davis, Jr., and Suzanne W. Helburn, "The Status of Social Studies Education: Impressions from Three NSF Studies, SOCIAL EDUCATION, February, 1979, 150-153; and David P. Wright, "Social Studies in 38 Schools: Research Findings from a Study of Schooling, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, Portland, Oregon, November, 1979.

8. Norman Frederiksin, "The Real Test Bias: Influences of Testing on Teaching and Learning," AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST, March, 184, 193-202.

9. Ken Carlson, "The National Assessment of Educational Progress in Social Studies," paper prepared for presentation, August, 1986.

Addendum

What Concepts Should We Assess?

The social studies profession is unfortunately unable to agree as to what constitute the major concepts of the social studies curriculum. Thus, at this time, recommendations cannot be made as to what specific concepts need to be assessed in social studies courses or at what grade level(s). Nevertheless, certain criteria can be suggested for evaluators to consider as they engage in the process of trying to write questions and/or devise other assessment tasks to measure students' conceptual learning. The application of these criteria depend partly on the nature of the courses offered, and the underlying academic disciplines (e.g., history, political science, etc.) and/or other emerging bodies of knowledge (e.g. law studies, environmental studies, global education, etc.) that constitute the knowledge base for these courses; partly on the ability of the social studies profession eventually (if they can) to agree as to what are the central or core concepts of the field; and partly on what concepts teachers and informed and educated members of the general public feel are important for students to learn in grades K-12.

Even if any sort of concensus with regard to the basic or core concepts does not eventually emerge, however, there do appear to be a number of concepts which social scientists and others find useful for their explanatory power, and there seems no reason why academic specialists, social studies professionals, and social studies teachers cannot be surveyed with regard to what concepts they think are most useful for students to acquire (and at what grade level), and which might serve as

the core concepts for the social studies curriculum in grades K-12. To assist them in this regard, the following criteria are suggested as a basis for identification and selection, with the central concern being the overall explanatory power of a concept (i.e., the degree to which it helps students explain the relationships among factual data).

1. How crucial is the concept for understanding and relating specific factual data included in an academic discipline or body of knowledge? (Power)
2. To how many varied areas, events, people, ideas, etc. does the concept apply? (Range of Applicability)
3. To what extent will the concept, if understood, promote understanding of other concepts? (Depth)
4. To what extent does the concept help students to describe and understand important aspects of human behavior and explain occurrences and events in the world? (Significance)
5. How much factual data does the concept encompass? (Inclusiveness)

Is There Any Factual Knowledge Which Is Absolutely Essential for Students to Learn?

In the simplest sense, the answer to this question is no! There is no one "fact" which all students must learn, the lack of knowledge of which prevents them from living a normal, productive life as a citizen. At least, there is none that I can think of. On the other hand, as I earlier suggested, some facts do seem more important than other facts to learn, and it might well be argued that there are many such facts (el-

though no one particular fact) for students to learn in order to be educated. While the exact nature of these facts remains open to debate, there do appear to be a number of topics about which some facts (probably the more the better) should be known. Further work on this question needs to be undertaken by a committee organized to devote its' energies directly to this question, but a few such topics are herewith suggested that I think the great majority of social studies professionals, social studies teachers, and the informed public might agree with:

- the basic principles upon which the United States was founded;
- The basic rights all citizens of the United States are guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution;
- the responsibilities of a citizen in a democratic society;
- slavery;
- the contributions of various ethnic groups to our heritage;
- the geography of the United States, and its geographic interrelationship with the rest of the world;
- our electoral system;
- how our economy operates;
- political, social, and economic changes which have occurred in the United States during the 20th century.